



# Interdisciplinary Studies

INTEGRATING FIELDS ACROSS DISCIPLINARY LINES – FACILITATING  
LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

# “General Studies,” “Comparative Literature” – education connections



## BA: The Evergreen State College, 1991

- ▶ State college (cheap, diverse)
- ▶ Intro courses team-taught, across disciplines
- ▶ Experiential (travel, internships, “camping for credit”)
- ▶ No majors
- ▶ “learning how to learn”

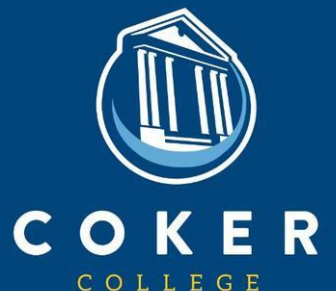
Editor/translator; software and print, 1992-1995:  
Microsoft Corporation



## PhD: University of California, Davis, 2001

- ▶ Combining literature, language, culture, theory, history
- ▶ Focus on interest, experience, writing
- ▶ Teaching: English Comp, Comparative Lit, Religious Studies, American Studies, ESL

“Generalist” – comp, American lit, children’s lit, theory, world lit, postcolonial lit, ...  
Director of Interdisciplinary Studies since 2017



# Students – YWM Coalition: 1<sup>st</sup> gen, underrepresented student population

- ▶ Lack of context – individual courses are confusing
- ▶ Lack of understanding of educational structure = lack of control over educational/professional destiny
- ▶ Making the structure visible
  
- ▶ Nothing “sticks”
- ▶ Unfamiliar references to history, geography, politics, issues, art
- ▶ Building a “grid” – helping students acquire, process, connect information

## Empower student:

- Build confidence
- Build general knowledge
- Build research skills
- Acknowledge existing interests, expertise
- Foster curiosity

# Learning outcomes (vs. subject-specific fact knowledge):

## General skills:

- ▶ Reading
- ▶ Writing
- ▶ Communicating in groups
- ▶ Understanding context
- ▶ Problem solving
- ▶ Critical thinking, mental dexterity
- ▶ Metacognition

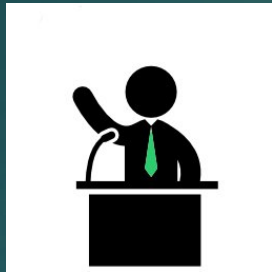
## What do you want the student to take away from your class?

- ▶ General understanding of subject – in relation to other subjects, professions, disciplines
- ▶ Love for, or interest in, subject
- ▶ Some experience researching information in the subject
- ▶ Confidence and interest in further studies
- ▶ Specific skills
- ▶ Specific knowledge

# Making connections across disciplines: providing visual context for material

## ENG245

### Guest lecture:



Ask a colleague who teaches material related to your field. Share responsibility of planning the class, so the material directly relates to your class.

Benefits: makes context visible, makes disciplines visible.

More interesting, maybe?



### In-class lecture:

Add images and sounds of background materials, based on google search

Slides of history, art, culture, geography

Create library of materials for repeat themes/projects



### Out-of-class research, student presentations

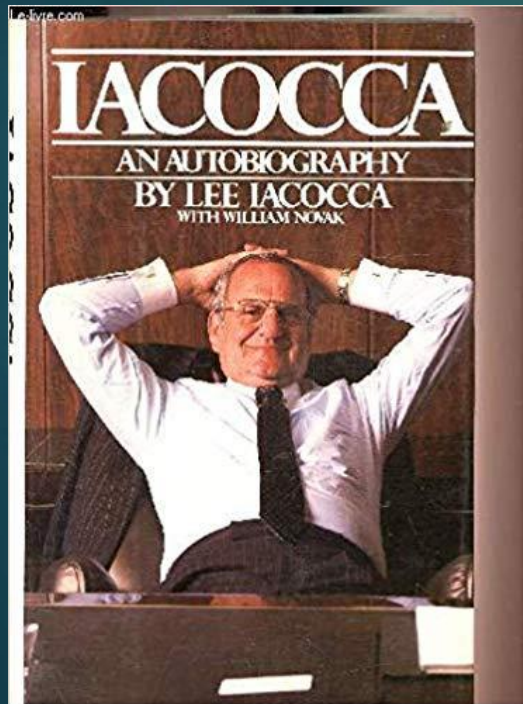
Assign student groups to research specific background information (support/advise in meetings, set guidelines)

Students present images, professor adds info during presentations.

Invite all students to comment and offer connections

# Adding Humanities Content to Business Courses: Leadership in the context of history

## HIS/SOC/ENG/PSY



Research business and leadership practices in the 1980s;

Research economy and car production in 1980s,

Present on the success of Iacocca's book in its historical context

Research polar explorer Edward Shackleton from the perspective of leadership;

Consider contexts of world history (1914: WW I) and absence of technology;

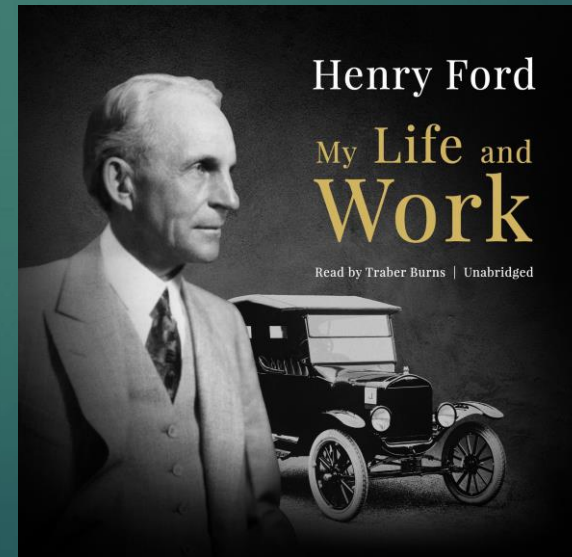
Present on leadership techniques under extreme circumstances

### SHACKLETON'S WAY: LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM THE GREAT ARCTIC EXPLORER

MARGOT MORRELL AND STEPHANIE CAPPARELL, PENGUIN, 2001

Disciplines combined: Business Management, History, Psychology

Managing individuals and group dynamics, early 20<sup>th</sup> century of history of exploration, stress and communication



Cars, wages, production: Economic theory under Henry Ford's innovation;

Attitudes towards immigrants and Jews in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century labor market

# Crossing Boundaries: classroom and “real world” (but not: internship)

“field trip project” on marketing

- ▶ Read Malcolm Gladwell: “The Science of Shopping with Paco Underhill” (1996) *SOC/PSY/ART/ENG*
- ▶ Compare store arrangements, sales promotions, and item displays between Walmart and a small boutique store;
- ▶ Can result in a paper or a visual presentation, photos



Interview project about relationship between course work and career experience  
*COM/SOC/EDU*

- ▶ Students interview two or three friends/family/coworkers who hold 2-year or 4-year degrees
- ▶ Ask questions about degrees/certification programs, relationship between training/studies and professional experience
- ▶ Results in video *about* the interviews, assessing and comparing
- ▶ Outcome: awareness of application of skills and knowledge, understanding relevance of course content.

# Assessment: reflection, journal, alternative “exams”

- ▶ Emphasize *learning* over acquisition of facts
- ▶ Encourage exploration, leave room for error and revision
- ▶ See what is *there*, not only what is *missing*
- ▶ “moving the needle” – different starting points; different end points; focus on individual net gain
- ▶ Choice in “exam” content: offer word bank as guidance, let student determine focus of final project/exam
- ▶ Reflections: emphasizing the *process* rather than the *result*

Comparable to “Portfolio grading” in ENG, “Process Paper” vs. “Research Paper” in ENG/LIB